



## News Release

**For Immediate Release**  
Wednesday, November 26, 2003

Contact:  
Jana Kettering  
Public Information Officer  
Office: 801-538-6339  
Or your local health department PIO

### **Utah's Influenza Cases Continue to Rise** Flu Shot Deemed Effective

(Salt Lake City, UT) - Cases of influenza illness have now been reported in all local health districts in Utah except for in the Uintah Basin. As of November 25, approximately 850\* cases of influenza have been reported to the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and local health departments, with 745 of the cases in Salt Lake County. The majority of the influenza cases have been in children and the UDOH urges parents to get vaccinated and to vaccinate their children. In addition, the UDOH Pregnancy RiskLine is receiving a high volume of calls with questions about influenza vaccine. Pregnant women in their second and third trimesters, and breastfeeding women, should receive the vaccine due to a higher risk of complications from the flu to both the mother and child.

Nationally, CDC reports that influenza activity has begun earlier this year than in any other year since data has been collected in the late 70s. Even with the early arrival, there is still time to get vaccinated. The influenza vaccine is safe and is the most effective way to prevent or lessen the severity of the disease and its complications. **Based on current CDC information, this year's vaccine appears to have acceptable effectiveness against the three circulating strains of influenza virus.** The UDOH encourages health care providers to continue vaccinating as long as vaccine is available.

The UDOH tracks influenza activity by reports of patients diagnosed with influenza (laboratory-confirmed), reports of patients with influenza-like symptoms (clinically diagnosed), by monitoring absenteeism at schools throughout the state and by monitoring the rates of influenza-like illness at 38 sentinel healthcare clinics. This year, many of the reported cases are in children under age 5, and 72 people have been reported to be hospitalized. School absenteeism rates have not yet increased above normal levels.

**- MORE -**

## **Page 2 of 3 – Utah’s Influenza Cases Continue to Rise**

Some groups of people are more likely to become seriously ill if they get influenza. Influenza vaccination is most important for people in those high-risk groups, which include:

- Healthy children from 6 to 23 months of age
- People over the age of 50
- People of all ages with chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease, or those with suppressed immune systems (such as cancer patients or those with AIDS)
- Those living in long-term care facilities
- Healthcare workers
- Pregnant women in their second or third trimesters; breastfeeding women
- Children and adolescents, age 6 months to 18 years who are on chronic aspirin therapy.
- Household contacts of people at high risk (including children) and those who work in settings where they might transmit influenza to those at high risk.

Children under 9 years of age who receive vaccine for the first time need a booster dose one month after the first dose. Parents should check with their health care provider to discuss annual influenza vaccination of healthy children. The cost of the vaccine is covered by the Vaccines for Children Program for eligible children up to age 18.

Vaccination is the single most important thing you can do to protect yourself from influenza. “Respiratory etiquette” can also prevent the spread of influenza – cover your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing, use disposable tissues and wash your hands afterward. Hand washing, when done correctly (washing for at least 10 seconds with soapy water), can help prevent the spread of influenza as well as other infections.

With the flu and holiday seasons overlapping this year, people can reduce the spread of the flu by not attending family, church, or public gatherings when they are feeling ill.

This would include staying away from shopping malls and restaurants during periods of illness.

### **Page 3 of 3 - Utah's Influenza Cases Continue to Rise**

If you think you have influenza (abrupt onset of fever, muscle aches and pains, cough and or sore throat), you may want to consult your physician. Prescription antiviral medications can reduce the symptoms and duration of flu. If you get the flu, you should rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco and take medication to relieve the symptoms of flu.

For more information about where to get the influenza vaccine or about the Vaccines for Children Program, contact your health care provider, local health department or call the Utah Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659. For questions about pregnancy and vaccine, call the UDOH Pregnancy RiskLine at 328-2229 in Salt Lake City or statewide at 1-800-822-2229.

\* This number of cases includes those that were laboratory-confirmed cases and those identified using rapid influenza testing.

Note: During the 2002-2003 influenza season, influenza cases were not reported in Utah until mid-December and the total case count for that season was 697 cases.

# # #

*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*